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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR BROWNFIELD'S JULY 7 MEETING WITH
AFRO-COLOMBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

REF: BOGOTA 1427

Summary:

¶11. (SBU) At a July 7 meeting with Association of Internally Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) President Geiler Romana, the Ambassador underscored U.S. support of Afro-Colombian communities through institution-building, human rights, and development programs. AFRODES said the GOC and international community need to provide more technical support, security, humanitarian aid, and sustainable economic projects to Afro-Colombians. They acknowledged the need for Afro-Colombians to build alliances with academic, humanitarian, and charitable institutions, but said many internally displaced Afro-Colombians suffer from racial discrimination, poverty, and lack of access to services and benefits. The Ambassador spoke to the press on leaving the meeting and emphasized the important role AFRODES plays in Colombia's future. End Summary.

Capacity-Building and Sustainability

¶12. (U) The Ambassador visited AFRODES' office on July 7 and met with its president, Geiler Romana, to highlight the importance of human rights groups promoting the interests of Afro-Colombians. Founded in 1999 and headquartered in Bogota, AFRODES is active in Cartagena, Tumaco, Cali, Buenaventura, and Narino and focuses on lobbying the GOC and international community to meet the needs of displaced Afro-Colombians. Romana said AFRODES needs technical, logistic, and institutional help from the GOC and international community to extend its presence throughout the country. It also seeks strategic alliances with humanitarian, academic, and charitable groups. Romana added that better security is required to protect threatened Afro-Colombian leaders. He also called on the GOC and international donors to consult with Afro-Colombian communities on development projects, arguing this would improve sustainability.

Increasing Numbers of Displaced Afro-Colombians

¶13. (SBU) AFRODES adviser Pedro Cortes said Afro-Colombians make up a disproportionate number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), especially in the Pacific coast. Citing its April 4 displacement report (reftel), Cortes noted that while overall figures for new IDPs have remained constant and even dipped in 2007, the number of new Afro-Colombian IDPs has steadily risen since 2004 with 45,000 in 2007 alone. Despite

institutional advances, many suffer from racism and lack access to resources, basic services, and legal assistance. Cortes complained that the GOC lacks a specific policy to address Afro-Colombian IDPs' needs, and said it needs to be more responsive to applications for assistance. He added that the GOC is starting to address the reparations issue but needs to do more. Cortes opined that racism and other "structural factors" -- in addition to the internal armed conflict -- contribute to Colombia's "persistent humanitarian crisis."

¶4. (SBU) AFRODES Secretary General Luz Marina Becerra said Afro-Colombian women are the most victimized. They lack the capacity to file official complaints or fight back because they fear retaliation. Some are attacked and falsely accused of being aligned with an illegal armed group. She cited the June 30 killing in Buenaventura of Afro-Colombian IDP leader Martha Cecelia Obando, an active participant in USAID's reconciliation program. Most women lack education and jobs, resorting to begging or prostitution to stay alive. Afro-Colombian youth often fall into drugs and gangs. The most marginalized have the most dire needs, but the GOC does not provide enough assistance.

Improving Program Efficiency and Impact

¶5. (U) The Ambassador underscored the USG's support for the Afro-Colombian community through USAID programs, including alternative development, governance, justice, and human rights. Institutional assistance for groups like AFRODES and the Afro-Colombian caucus in Congress remain priorities. The

Ambassador said the USG would continue to work with local and regional groups to help vulnerable communities by providing schools, clinics, community centers, and housing. As communities gain confidence and skills, they can develop self-sustaining economic development projects. He encouraged AFRODES to provide us information on communities' needs, as well as on what works and what does not, to help improve the efficiency and impact of our assistance programs.

BROWNFIELD